

Opening Ceremony of Aalto University
Friday 8 Dec 2010



Opening Speech

President Tuula Teeri
Aalto University

President Tuula Teeri's Address at the Opening Ceremony of Aalto University

Following over 4 years of intensive preparations, we come together today to celebrate the official inauguration of Aalto University. The historical merger of three of the most highly regarded and renowned Finnish universities was formalised just 8 days ago.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all those that have made invaluable contributions to the Finnish university reform in general and the birth of Aalto University in particular.

Today thus is truly a new beginning and an ideal moment for reflection; What kind of a university are we going to build? How are we going to achieve our ambitious goals?

The world is changing – knowledge is expanding and our problems have become far more complex than before – therefore universities also must reform. Aalto University has been granted more freedom, but also given the responsibility to build a world class university in Finland. We will base our efforts on the strengths and values characteristic to Finland and the Finnish people – diligence and perseverance – the so called Finnish SISU.

Our mission is to change the world through top-quality research, pioneering education and continuous renewal.

We will educate responsible, broad-minded experts to act as future visionaries in our society.

We will make use of our unique profile to stimulate innovations by surpassing traditional boundaries.

We will build an open community of students and experts, academic and others, for free exchange of ideas to impact the society at large.

How then shall we achieve these objectives? My personal experiences as a scientist and an academic leader, in both Finland and Sweden, have convinced me of a few necessary reforms.

First of all, it will be necessary to create internationally attractive working conditions for our faculty and students to succeed in their own fields.

Secondly, it is important to acknowledge that creative, uncompromising basic research is the pillar on which new knowledge and expertise rest. Basic research is also the foundation for

innovative applied research. At Aalto University, art parallels basic research in the fields of architecture and design.

The two most important requirements of top-quality research and art are ensuring sufficiently long-term funding and establishing transparent career systems that motivate and challenge talented researchers and artists.

Thus the single most significant investment that Aalto University will make is to establish a tenure track career system in line with international models. In this system, emerging faculty is recruited in international competition. Those selected will be offered an independent position, sufficient resources and support, and a clear career path towards a permanent professorship. Starting this year, Aalto University will be opening 20-40 new tenure track positions annually. In about 10 years we will reach a balanced faculty profile with highly competent researchers and teachers at different stages of the tenure track. The adoption of the tenure track model will guarantee continuous renewal, and also internationalization of the university.

In striving for excellence, it is essential that good achievements are continuously acknowledged and rewarded. Therefore the career track at Aalto University does not end at a permanent professorship but a promotion to a distinguished professor category, the Aalto Professor, is also possible. This is a position awarded to faculty that has achieved an internationally leading position in their field. It is my great pleasure therefore to announce that the first nomination in this category has been awarded to Professor Risto Nieminen from the Department of Applied Physics in the Aalto School of Science and Technology. Professor Nieminen is specializing in computational condensed-matter and materials physics, including nanosciences and nanotechnology.

Together with the development of better career systems, Aalto University will emphasize academic leadership. In addition to excellent researchers and teachers, universities – similar to other professional organizations – also need excellent leaders acting as the role models for the community. Aalto University will work to provide its academic leaders proper management processes, tools, support and training. Alongside academic achievements, good leadership must be recognised and rewarded.

Small countries cannot excel in all fields, thus choices must be made. It is important to identify and focus on areas where top international level has already been reached and those that have high potential to become internationally competitive.

The Aalto international research assessment exercise carried out in 2009 evaluated the research performance of all together 46 departments. According to the evaluation the two most successful departments were the Department of Applied Physics and the Department of Information and Computer Science from the Aalto University School of Science and Technology. Another 17 units were found to have research at high international level. These units will now be supported with increased research funding for the next three years. The results of the research assessment will also provide important guidance for setting the future research priorities of Aalto University.

International recognition provides further means for defining excellence. Two major recent awards are specially worth noting; in December the European Institute of Innovation and

Technology (EIT) decided to establish one node of the European Knowledge and Innovation Community for Information and Communication technology in Finland. Together with Aalto University, the other founding members of the node are Nokia and VTT.

Aalto University also played a significant role in the selection of the Helsinki Metropolitan area as the World Design Capital in 2012.

Scientific breakthroughs and radical innovations are often born in multidisciplinary collaborations, with one field of research studying and feeling the borders of another one. The marriage of science and art with technology and business in the Aalto University will give unique opportunities for co-creation across many different disciplinary borders.

We are already running one major Aalto-wide research program, and three Aalto Factories focusing on Product Design, Media and Service Science. The factories provide opportunities for interdisciplinary collaborations and dynamic interactions not only between researchers but also involving students, and representatives from companies and public organizations.

Entrepreneurship is one channel for realizing innovation. The working practices developed in the Aalto Factories are also giving rise for a new generation of entrepreneurs. In particular, the students of Aalto University have founded a very active Entrepreneurship Society that already has one thousand members.

The International Research Assessment Exercise praised Aalto University as exemplary in social responsibility. The university was described a committed partner in collaborations based on real-life problems, challenges and opportunities. We will work to maintain and strengthen our societal impact by building long-lasting, strategic partnerships. We will also create new forms of interaction with the world of industry and commerce and with public bodies in Finland and internationally.

One such example will be the Aalto Learning Center, an open space buzzing with activity, and a window to the surrounding society. There scientists, artists, students, businesses, social opinion leaders and the greater public can meet within the spheres of research, art and education.

We will also create new forums for building research agendas for research focus areas of national significance, and for working towards a comprehensive understanding of key global challenges.

Students are full-pledged members of the research and learning community of that Aalto University is building. In order to address issues of key importance for our present and future students, I will now transform myself into an avatar, and move on to Second Life. Thank you!